THE KAREN AND KARENNI PEOPLE
Who are the Karen and Karenni people?

The Karen and Karenni people are ethnic groups whose ancestral lands are located along the Thai-Burma border.

Burma’s contemporary Kayah State is a part of the homelands of the Karenni people and contemporary Karen State is part of the homelands of the Karen people.

The Karen and Karenni people are predominantly Christian, however many communities identify as Buddhist.
Did You Know?

Hundreds of thousands of Karen and Karenni people have resettled in the United States.

There are approximately 2,000 Karenni and 17,000 Karen families in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota.
Languages and Identities of the Karenni people

The Karenni peoples consist of many subgroups where they speak different dialects: The Kayah, Kayan (Padaung), Kayaw, Geko, Geba, Manu Manaw, Yintale, Yinbaw, Bwe, and Paku.

The name Karenni, meaning Red Karen, comes from the brightly-colored traditional clothing of the largest ethnic group, the Kayah or Kayah li Phu.

Karenni people most commonly speak Karenni language, or Kayah Li.
Languages and Identities of the Karen people

The Karen people consist of two main subgroups, S’gaw and Po, that speak different dialects.

Kaw Thoo Lei, meaning “land without evil” or “peaceful land” refers to the ancestral lands for which the Karen people have sought sovereignty over from the Burmese nation.

Fun fact: Karen people often refer to each other as “brother” or “sister,” stemming from a belief that all human beings are connected to one another.
Dee Ku: A Karenni Celebration of Unity

One important tradition of the Karenni peoples is making “dee ku”, a food consisting of sticky rice wrapped in bright green leaves.

This food symbolizes unity and is made during the month of September to represent solidarity among Karenni people.
Wrist Tying: Tying Karen Threads through the Generation

An important tradition for Karen people is the wrist tying ceremony that occurs usually in the month of August.

Elders tie red and white threads on younger generations as symbols of being Karen call the spirits of Karen people who were lost in their ancestral journey to present-day Burma.
Resources

karennirefugees.com
likewedontexist.com/aboutthekarenni
karenniamerican.org
mnkaren.org
theurbanvillage.org
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